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WASHINGTON POST AND
TIMES HERALD
FEB 1

Agent's Decision to Defect Cannot Be an Easy One

By Tom Lambert
Herald Tribune News Service

In the murky shadow world of the CIA and the Soviet KGB, of France's Deuxieme Bureau and the British MI-6, the defector is prized as one of the most valuable catches in espionage, especially if he is in the enemy's intelligence service, like Yuri I. Nosenko.

Nosenko, a 36-year-old officer in Russia's KGB secret police, espionage and counter espionage apparatus, defected to the United States last week in Switzerland.

The publicity about the defection violated some of the cardinal rules and traditions of espionage. First, the Soviets disclosed it. Second, the United States confirmed it. Why? Such defections ordinarily are not acknowledged by either country.

Interview Unusual

Even more unusual is that Soviet and Swiss diplomats were permitted to interview Nosenko in Washington Friday. The Russian reportedly said he wanted to remain in the United States and the State Department promptly announced that he would be granted political asylum. The Soviets had charged that the United States had kidnaped Nosenko and accused the Swiss with complicity in the affair.

Since Nosenko is believed to have been a double agent—working for American intelligence from within the KGB—his defection probably began much earlier, when he first talked with some U.S. agent about abandoning Russia.

Barring the decision to defect, a soul-tearing move no matter what the motive, a defector's first tentative step to desert his country is one of the most nightmarish he makes.

Defection stems from various causes. Sometimes it is hatred of country, or longing for another. Sometimes defections are prompted by domestic difficulties, or trouble with the authorities. And sometimes defection is induced by enemy offers of cash or position, or by blackmail.

Some Astonishingly Simple

Some defectors' first contacts are astonishingly simple, others involved.

One snowy night in 1954, KGB officer Peter Deriabin walked into American military headquarters in Vienna and told two GIs on duty he wanted to see an Army counter intelligence officer or a CIA agent.

A Russian-speaking Army captain was summoned. Deriabin told him he wanted to defect. The captain asked him if he knew what he was doing and saying. Deriabin said yes. That was that.

That same year, a former vaudeville show whistler named Nikolai Khokhlov knocked on the door of Georgi Okolovich's apartment in Frankfurt, West Germany.

Khokhlov identified himself as a KGB assassin and told Okolovich, head of a Russian emigre organization, he had been assigned to murder him with a KGB-designed cigarette case pistol. Khokhlov said he could not pull the trigger. Okolovich

offered to put him in touch with some American Intelligence agents.

Shortly thereafter, Khokhlov was told to drive to a site near the Frankfurt Opera House, where an American entered his car and began to question him.

Khokhlov wrote later the American refused to believe his story, or that he wanted to defect. But he finally was able to convince that American, or others, that he was sincere.

Some More Valuable

There are various types of defectors, some more valuable than others. Thus, to American intelligence, Nosenko is a vastly more valuable defector than a ballet dancer, like Rudolf Nureyev.

For intelligence organizations, the most valuable baggage a defector can bring with him is information: data on weapons, defense plans, industry, scientific developments, foreign and domestic policy, the inner workings of his government.

Often, intelligence agencies try to "turn" defecting espionage officers, to persuade them to go back on the job but as double agents, called "defectors in place."

For defectors who do not remain "in place" but abandon their country, it often means leaving family behind, months or years of silence and isolation. And it can mean continuing fear that the defector country's espionage agents will try to kill him.

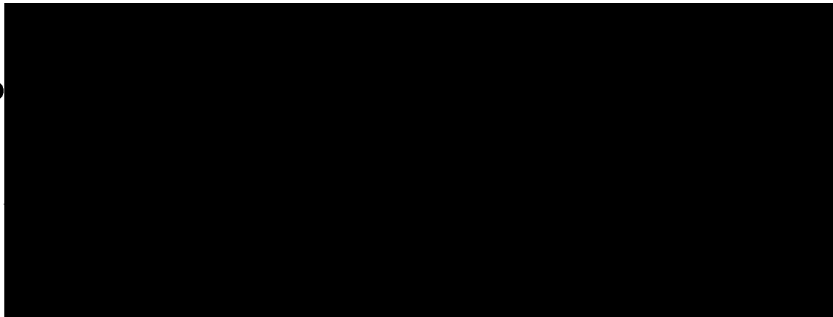
YURI NOSENKO, Soviet defector, told the Swiss Embassy in Washington Friday that he left Switzerland of his own free will and does not intend to return to the Soviet Union, the Swiss government said in a brief announcement at Bern.

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